

Municipal Institutions in Ontario

Introduction

The first statutes of Canada contained Acts relating to the municipal government of those portions of the country having a sufficient number of inhabitants to require it. Development, however, was slow until 1841, when The District Councils Act was passed. Under this Act, the Government retained the right to appoint the wardens, clerks, and treasurers, and approve of by-laws. This was followed by a considerable agitation for an extension of principles of responsible government. The result was the passing of The Municipal Act of 1849, providing for the incorporation of local municipalities. This has been termed the Magna Charta of municipal institutions, not only of Ontario, but of the newer provinces of Canada. Although amended at nearly every session of Parliament, changes have been chiefly in the direction of amplification and detail.

When the Ontario Legislature met in 1868, the municipal corporations of the Province consisted of thirty-six counties, three hundred and ninety-nine townships, and one hundred and four cities, towns, and villages, all working under the powers conferred by the Act respecting municipal institutions in Upper Canada. Under Provincial control, the general municipal development of the Province has exceeded the highest anticipation of its originators. In no quarter of the world are there institutions of a similar kind so admirably adapted to the wants, intelligence, and genius of the people. In reference to this, Sir Charles Dilke, in his "Problems of Greater Britain," says: "The system of local government adopted in Ontario may be looked upon as nearly perfect, and certainly the best in the whole world."